

Norfolk County Council Updates – 22/01/26

Norfolk's bus service improvements

Norfolk County Council's ambitious Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has transformed public transport across the county, driving a 26% increase in passenger numbers since 2022 and making Norfolk a leading national example for sustainable travel.

Not only are we seeing record-setting and increasing numbers of passengers but customer satisfaction has also risen to 87%, bucking national trends and reinforcing Norfolk's approach to improvements in bus travel across the county.

A paper discussed at the council's Infrastructure and Development Committee on 22 January highlights what has been delivered thanks to the £65.45 million secured for Norfolk from the Department for Transport. The paper is available [here](#).

DigiFest at Norfolk Libraries

DigiFest returns to Norfolk libraries throughout February, offering a month-long celebration of digital creativity. Running from 1–28 February, with many activities taking place over half-term, the programme is completely free, although most events need to be booked in advance.

As part of Norfolk County Council's digital inclusion strategy, DigiFest encourages children and young people to build confidence and develop new digital skills. With more than 130 events planned across libraries, participants can try stop-motion animation, experiment with coding and robotics, explore artificial intelligence, and much more.

Further details and booking information are available at www.norfolk.gov.uk/digifest

Adult Social Care Transformation

Norfolk County Council Adult Social Care Department has posted a video outlining the vision and ambition of their Transformation Programme.

The video talks about the vision for Adult Social Care transformation and how communities will play an important role in creating that wrap around support for residents. [Adult Social Care Transformation video](#)

The transformation programme is designed to help residents and communities live their best life well in ways that matter to them. It focuses on preventing issues early, building stronger relationships with people, and connecting them with local support. By working more closely at neighbourhood level, improving how we commission services, and continually learning from what works, we aim to provide more joined-up and responsive support for everyone.

Proposal to uplift foster carer pay

Foster carers in Norfolk are set to benefit from a 15% uplift in their pay, as Norfolk County Council looks to invest £1.5m annually in its fostering service in a bid to support more children in care to live with families.

Norfolk's Cabinet will meet on Monday 26 January to discuss the proposal, which is part of a three-year transformation programme aimed at recognising the contribution of foster carers and the vital role they play in supporting children in care to flourish.

Further information is available in our news release [here](#).

Investment in the Independent Living Programme

Norfolk County Council is considering investing a further £35 million towards its Independent Living Housing Programme.

Since its launch in November 2018, the programme has contributed capital funding towards 603 high-quality, modern apartments designed for people aged 55 and over who want to stay independent in their local communities in later life.

Rising construction costs and new regulatory requirements have impacted delivery within the original £29 million capital budget. Cabinet is being asked to approve the additional funding to enable delivery of the remaining 532 homes by the programme. These homes will help save the council money every year by avoiding the need for people to move into residential care.

Further details and a link to the report to Cabinet report are available in our news release [here](#)

Future of Care Homes

The council launched a review of its care estate last year, as its contract with Norse Care Ltd is due to end in March 2026.

Stow Healthcare, a company that runs good and outstanding care facilities, is interested in buying Norfolk County Council's care company and 20 homes.

If Norfolk County Council agrees a deal with Stow Healthcare, residents of the homes would continue to live there, and existing Norse Care staff would move to the new owner.

Since the contract started in 2011, people's care needs have become more complex and most of the 20 care homes now require modernisation. Three of the homes have closed already but are being included in the proposed sale.

The council's cabinet meets on 26 January to decide whether to agree the "in principle" sale to Stow Healthcare, subject to the details of any sale being agreed with the director of strategic finance in consultation with the leader, deputy leader and the board of Norse Group.

Further details, including a list of the 20 homes, are available in our press release [here](#).

National Updates

Warm Homes Plan

The Government has [announced](#) a £15 billion Warm Homes Plan aimed at providing households with solar panels and green technology to reduce energy bills and triple the number of homes with solar energy. The 'Warm Homes Plan' targets help at low-income

families, alongside a universal offer, to ensure that working families can feel the benefits of products that can cut their bills.

Public Accounts Committee report on children's residential care

A new Public Accounts Committee [report](#) on children's residential care has warned that the children's residential care system 'is not working', with a national shortage of suitable placements and unclear government strategy for reform.

In response, the County Councils Network [described](#) a 'perfect storm' of rising demand and insufficient local provision. They cautioned that, without change, councils could be spending £12 billion a year on children in care by 2030 and urged government to implement proposed social care reforms quickly and provide around £2.6 billion for early intervention and prevention to help reduce the need for crisis placements.

WorkWell expansion

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have [announced](#) that WorkWell, a pilot health-and-employment support service, will be rolled out across England to help people with health conditions stay in or return to work.

WorkWell acts as an early-intervention, health-led service that is locally designed and integrates with local NHS, council, and community services to prevent people from leaving work due to health issues or supporting them back to work quickly if they fall out.

DWP say that it will be rolled out across all of England, backed by up to £259 million over the next three years. It will be available through NHS Integrated Care Boards working in partnership with Local Authorities, Jobcentre Plus, and community organisations to deliver locally designed services that meet specific community needs.

Mobile phones and social media

The Government has [announced](#) a 'national conversation' on children's social media use and bans phones in schools to protect young people's wellbeing and ensure safer online experiences. This will look at options including raising the digital age of consent, implementing phone curfews to avoid excessive use, and restricting potentially addictive design features such as 'streaks' and 'infinite scrolling'.

House of Lords backs UK social media ban for under-16s

The House of Lords has supported a move to ban under-16s from social media platforms. By 261 votes to 150, opposition peers voted to support a ban through an amendment to the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#).